

Introduction

Fertility Decline

- Widespread and drastic decline in birth rate in Western Europe during the nineteenth century
- Between 1850 and 1914, fertility rates nearly halved

Ignorance about Sex and Bodies

- Ignorance about sexuality was abundant at this time
- Lack of knowledge about sex, pregnancy, and certain anatomical parts of the body

Marie Stopes and her Correspondence

- Marie Stopes (1880-1958) was a British scholar, writer, and birth control advocate
- After two years of marriage, she realized her marriage had never been consummated.
- Wrote *Married Love* in 1918 to spread sexual knowledge and to help others to have happy, healthy marriages
- Wrote *Wise Parenthood* in 1918 to address her readers' questions about contraception
- In 1921 she opened up the first birth control clinic in Britain
- Between 1918 and 1944, she received letters from approximately 5,000 people across all social classes and from all over the world



Sponge



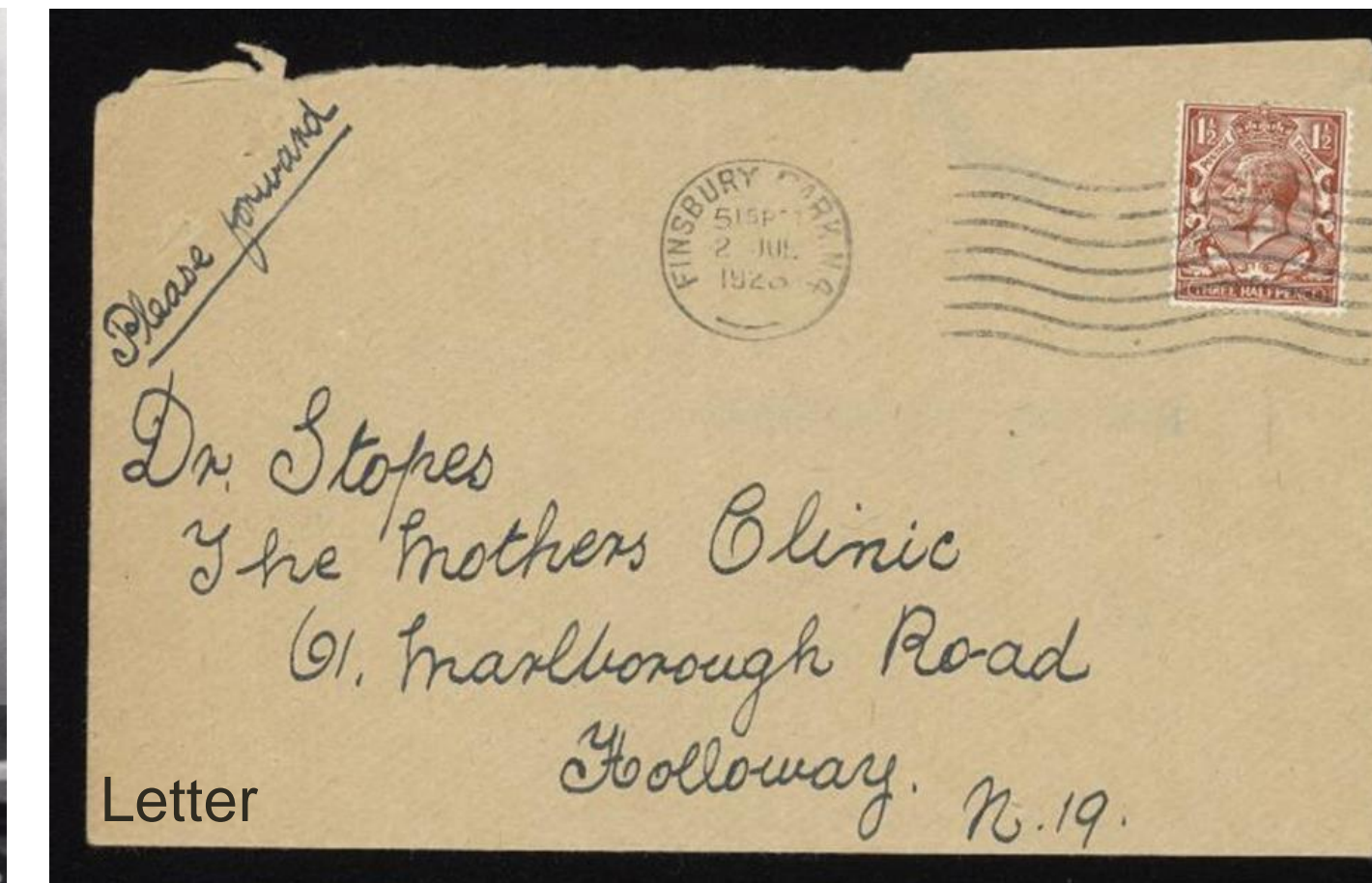
Sheath



Rubber Cap Pessary



Marie Stopes



Letter

Methods

- Marie Charlotte Carmichael Stopes (1880-1958) collection in the Wellcome Library in London, England.*
 - A sample of 246 letters from series A, "M[arried] L[ove] letters and other general correspondence, c. 1915-1957,"
- Secondary sources

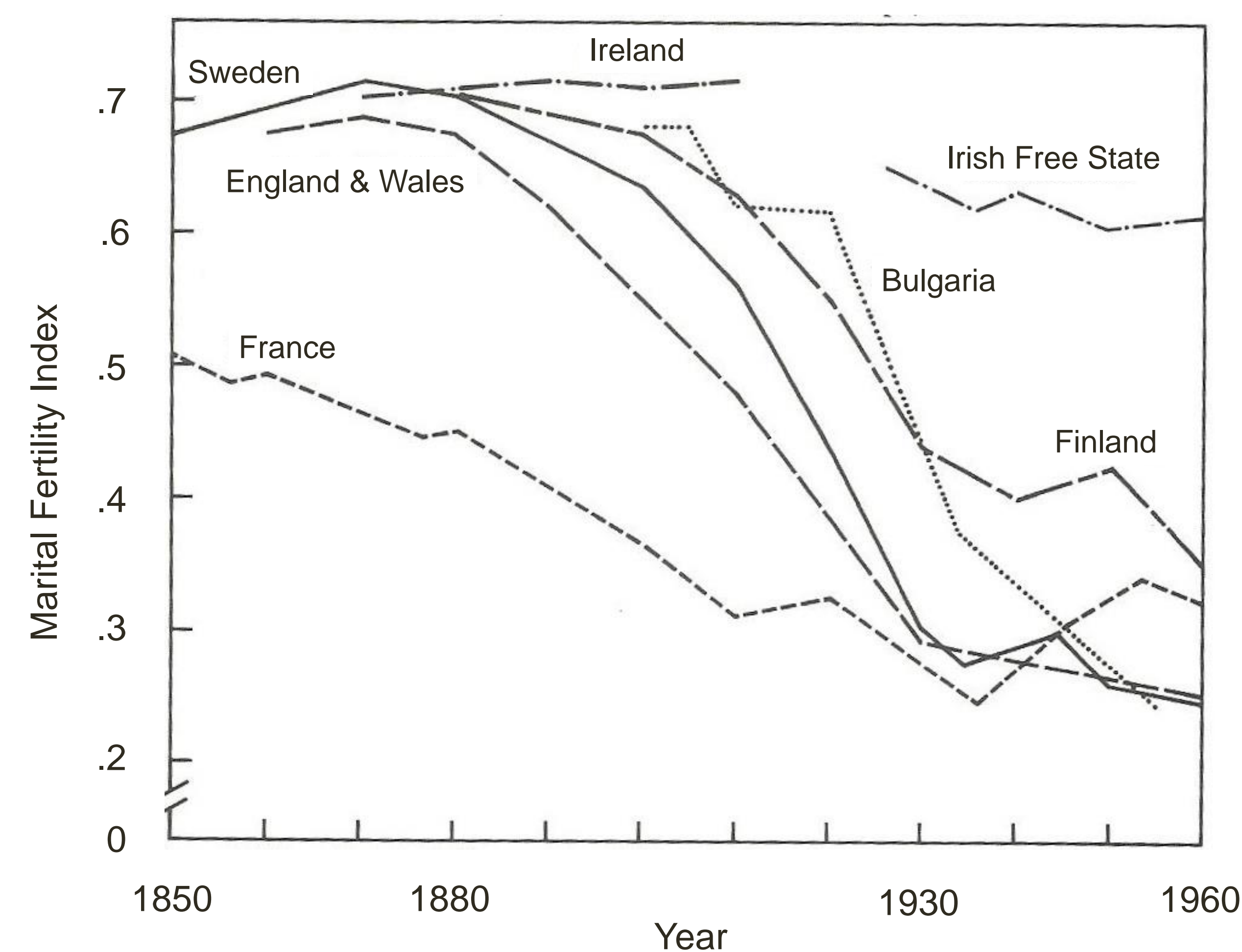


Chart 1. Marital fertility in selected countries of Europe, 1850-1960.

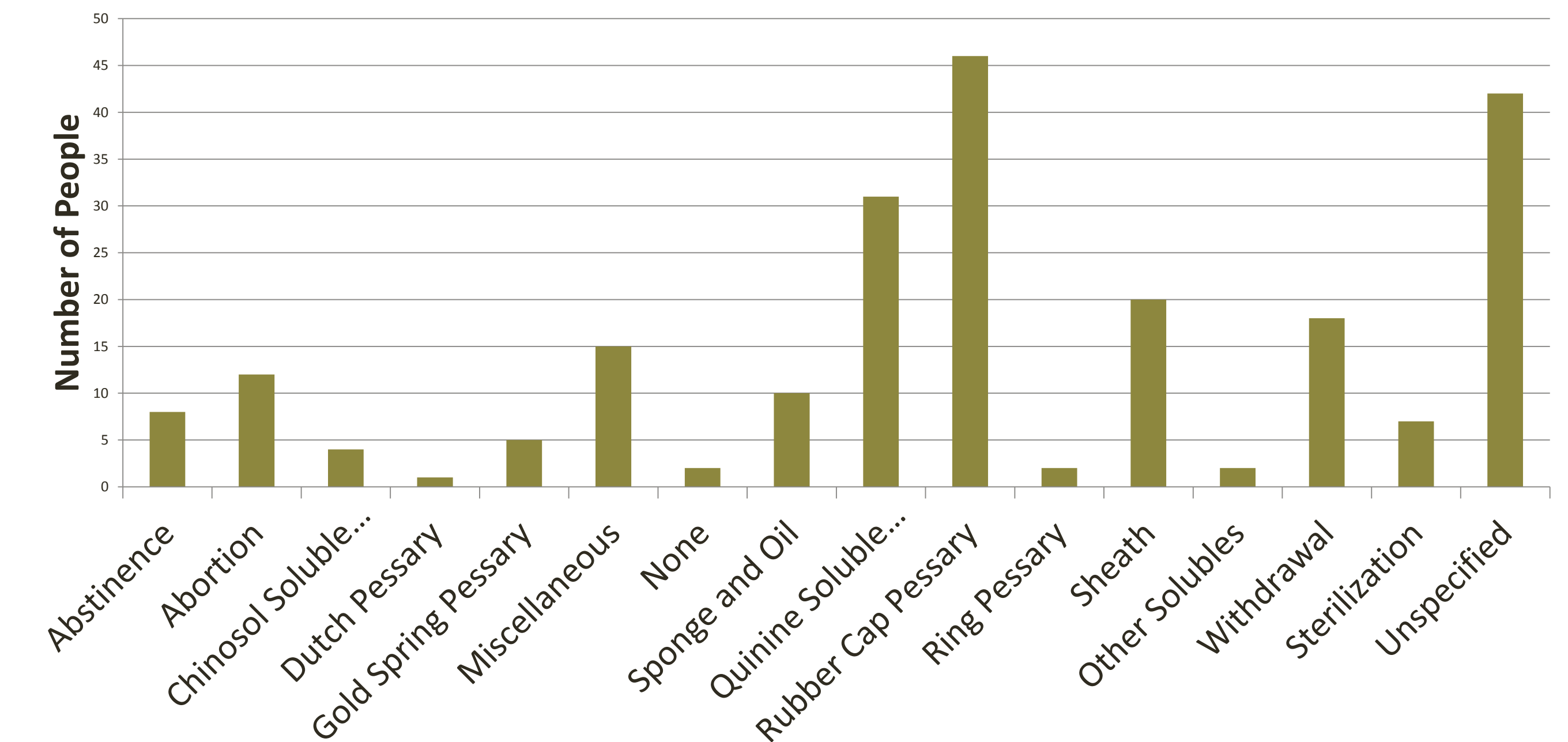


Chart 2. Contraception methods used and inquired about in sample from the Marie Stopes Correspondence, 1918-1941.

Results

Most Common Types of Contraceptive Practices:

- Rubber cap pessary, quinine soluble pessary, sheath, withdrawal, abortion, sponge and oil, and abstinence (in order from most common to least common)

Problems and concerns people had with contraceptive methods:

- Safety, effectiveness, difficulty or confusion with use, misuse, physical discomfort, inhibition of sexual pleasure, accessibility, and cost



Chinosol Solubles



Gold Spring Pessary

Conclusions

- People used contraceptive devices in addition to traditional birth control methods
- Despite many challenges to various methods of contraception, people actively sought out information about contraceptive devices
- Conversations between spouses about birth control took place, and challenges were seen as mutual problems that spouses worked together to solve

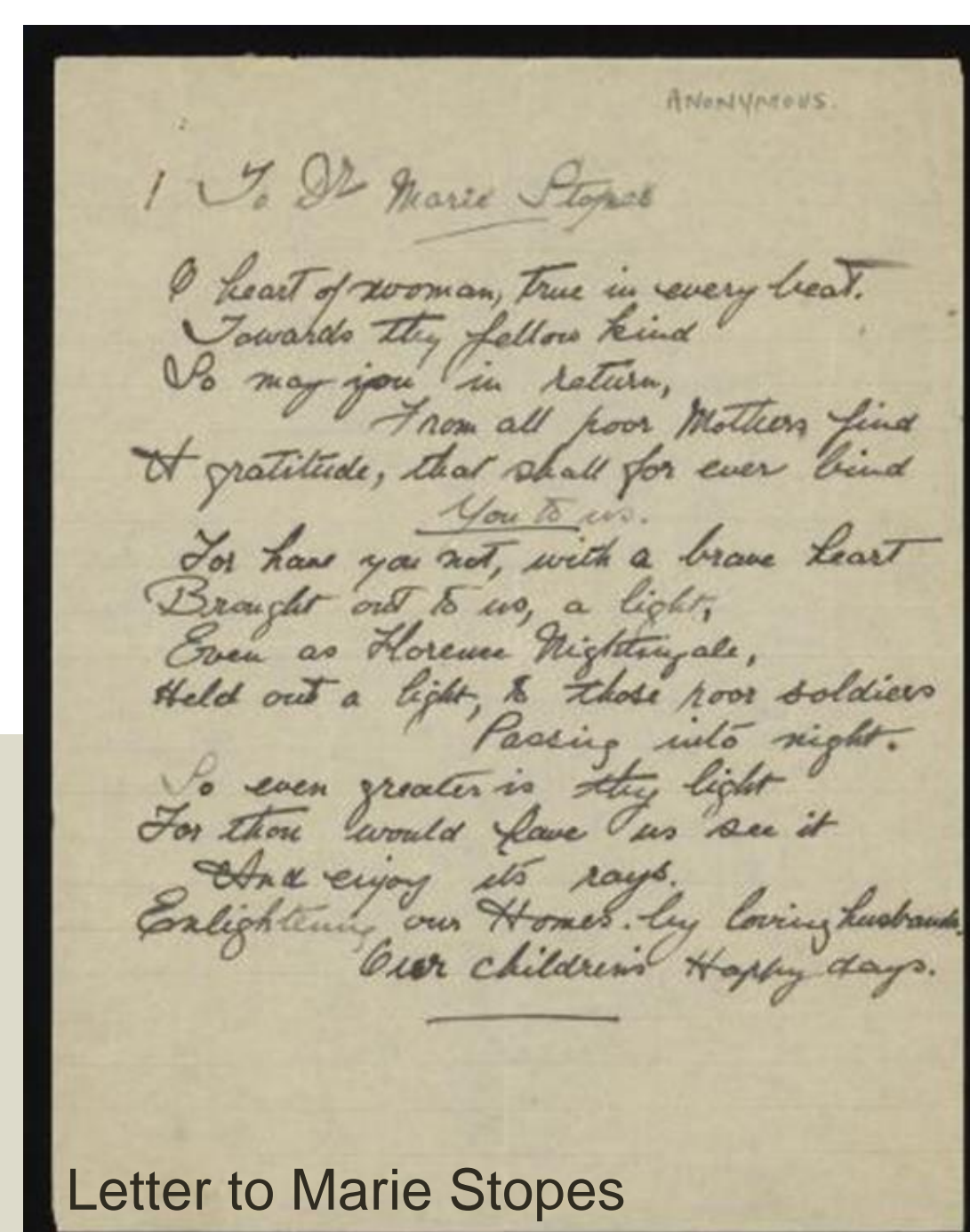
References

- Hall, Ruth. *Marie Stopes: A Biography* (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1977).
- Holtzman, Ellen M. "The Pursuit of Married Love: Women's Attitudes toward Sexuality and Marriage in Great Britain, 1918-1939" (*The Journal of Social History*, 1982).
- Marie Stopes International Australia.
- Smith, Bonnie. *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath Company, 1989).
- Wellcome Trust (wellcomeimages.org and wellcomelibrary.org).

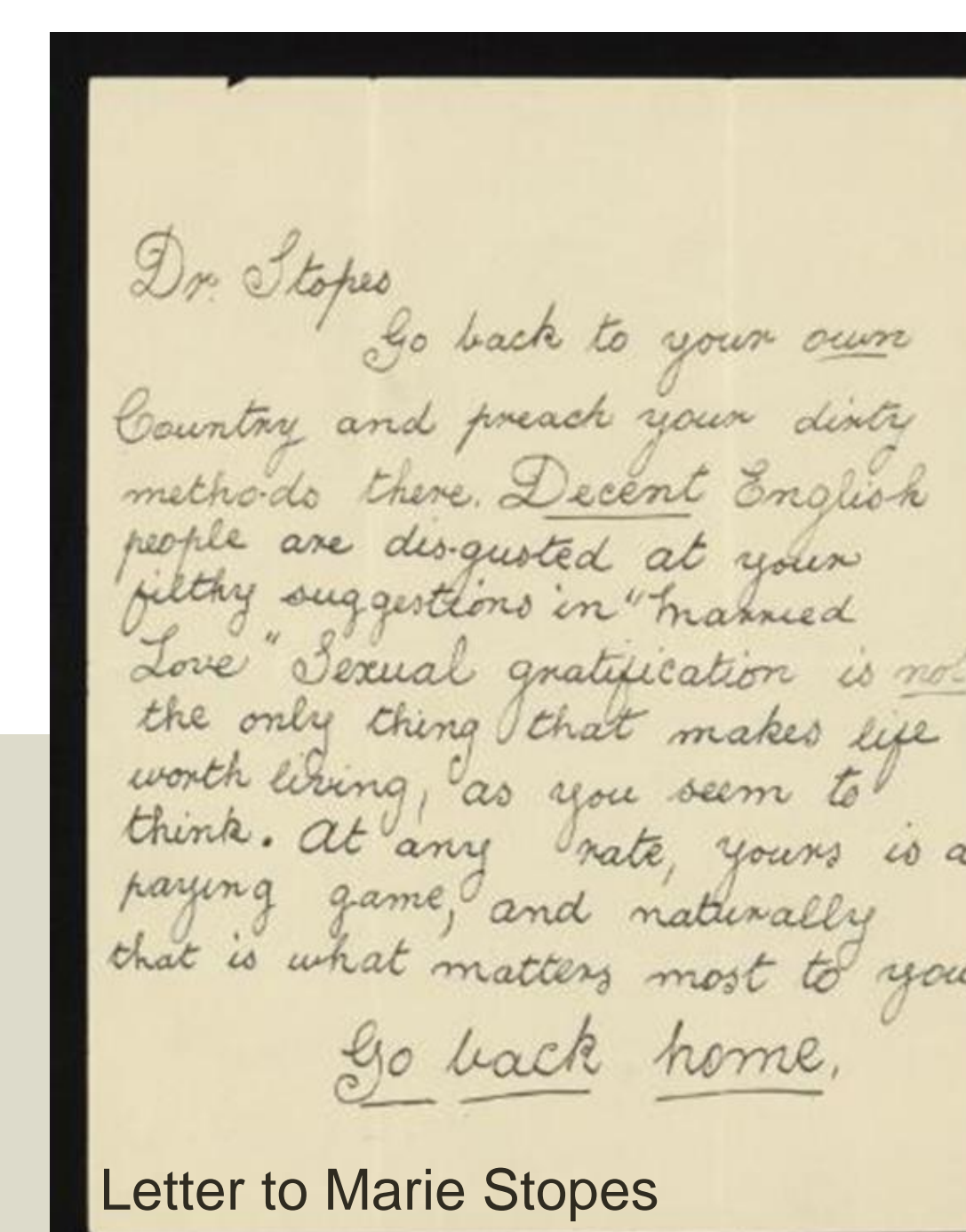
Research Objectives

This project investigates:

- The extent to which ordinary people used contraceptive devices in addition to or instead of traditional birth control methods during the early-twentieth century
- Which types of birth control were used
- The challenges ordinary people faced with certain methods of birth control
- How the spread of knowledge about sex, the human body, and birth control may have influenced ordinary people in Western Europe in the early-twentieth century



Letter to Marie Stopes



Letter to Marie Stopes